



COVID 19 : INDIA'S LOOMING MIGRANT AND CRISIS OF MIDDLE CLASS PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to highlight the situation and condition of migrants and middle class people in the time of COVID-19. As we all know that the year 2020 has pen down its name in the history. As it is being believed by many people that this year has brought unfortunate with it. People are living their life by locking themselves in their houses. Somehow, this year also bring some positivity with it as the life of people become normal. In addition to it, planet also recover itself. However, its drawbacks overweight its benefits. The point which I am going to consider while writing this paper is how the middle class and labour class are trying to combat the situation. No doubt, for some people it brings happiness as people get an opportunity to spend quality time with their family. In contrary, there are some people, who are suffering to even have a single meal in their life. Such people even are unable to live with their families as they are already living far away from their families due to work and other reasons. In particularly, this paper would not only describe the condition of migrants but also tries to analyze the measures that has been implemented by the government for these people along with some suggestion that can be proved beneficial to handle the situation.

KEYWORDS: migrants, middle class, combat, covid-19, suffering, families, condition

INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 has commenced and unfortunately, it has a stormy start. The year brought many disasters, tragedies, demise, conflicts (National and International) and the most dangerous virus corona virus with it. This virus has put the world on the shock as with its arrival the whole world stopped its movement, it just stagnant at a place. The whole world lives under the four walls of their place, economic growth of countries has been started declining. Not only this, students are suffering as their future are also at stake. Though the half year has almost passed yet people are waiting for a little hope to survive and waiting for any miracle to be happened so that ray of sunshine could be enjoyed.

OBJECTIVE

This paper tries to

- analyse those people who are being affected the most
- find out the way to combat the suffering
- checkout the validation of the policy which are exercised by the Government to help the sufferers

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The author has used primary and secondary both methods to write this paper. The primary

concept has been taken by having word to word conversation with all kinds of people and secondary data is collected through articles, journals, books and magazines.

Who are suffering the most ?

Well, to write about particular person or community would not be appropriate to describe in reality who is suffering or not. In such a situation, almost each and every sector has been affected. However, I personally opine that middle class and migrants are among those people who are suffering the most. Large proportion of migrants have lost their job. As a result, they started moving back to their home town which has created a chaos everywhere. The middle class have also suffered at large. Mostly middle class are those who do jobs in private companies or some of them have their own companies or business. Due to lockdown, the reduction in salary and loss of work resulted imbalance and disturbance in the position of middle class. For these reasons, I believe that Migrants and middle class are the people who are suffering the most.

Who are Migrants ?

The main source of officially used data on migration in India comes from the 2011 Census¹, which found that 455 million Indians, or over one-

¹ Data obtained from censusindia.gov.in



third of the population could be classified as "migrants". The Census defines a migrant as a person who is at a different place from his or her "usual place residence" at the time of the Census enumeration. However, the vast majority of these "migrants" are women who have moved out of their village or town to get married. Economic migrants make up less than a tenth of all migrants at just over 45 million.

If the government was expecting that India has just 45 million economic migrants, the number walking on roads, highways, and train tracks would have caught it off guard. When Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman² announced support for stranded migrants, she said that their number had been estimated at 80 million, already nearly twice the Census estimates for economic migrants. The 2016-17 Economic Survey estimated that the total migrant workforce could have been over 100 million in 2016.

Migrants are those people who move to other region for work, education or for some other reasons. Migrants are basically of two types: Long-term based and Short-term based.

CONDITIONS OF MIGRANTS

Condition of migrants are like those who have no place to live. The migrants are unable to survive in other regions as they are jobless and unable to pay rents and finding difficulty to meet both ends meet. Tens of thousands of daily-wage migrant workers suddenly found themselves without jobs or a source of income when India announced a lockdown on 24 March. Overnight, the cities they had helped build and run seemed to have turned their backs on them, the trains and buses which should have carried them home suspended. So with the looming fear of hunger, men, women and children were forced to begin arduous journeys back to their villages - cycling or hitching rides on tuk-tuks, lorries, water tankers and milk vans. For many, walking was the only option. Some travelled for a few hundred kilometres, while others covered more than a thousand to go home. They weren't always alone - some had young children and others had pregnant wives, and the life they had built for themselves packed into their ragtag bags.

More than a story of the Great Indian Dream, the story of short-term migrants is one of desperation. Without the social capital of well-established long-term migrants, they found it hard to stay put in India's big cities. For the past two months, if the government has often seemed like it was surprised by the number of migrants on the road, it might just be true. Official estimates undercount short-term migrants who are the most vulnerable, and differ significantly from more stable long-term migrants.

Driven by a distress the rulers of the land have been impervious to, the group of men and women had started walking from Jalna, in Maharashtra³, towards Madhya Pradesh, on Thursday (May 7) evening. Adding to the civilisational journeys of the dispossessed that have become synonymous with the lockdown.

After walking for 45 km, weary to the bone, they lay down to sleep on the rail track at about 3:30 am. They must have thought it was completely safe. After all, they knew from bitter experience that passenger trains were not running; it was why they were walking all the way to Bhusawal, a couple of hundred kilometres away, in the hope of catching a Shramik special that would take them closer home to their destination in Madhya Pradesh.

In the absence of the train they so desperately wanted to board, the track must have seemed oddly comforting. As someone mentioned, they call those planks 'sleepers'.

At 5:15 am, they were killed as a goods train ran over them. A newspaper report says they were aged between 20 and 35.

What was left unsaid was that everything has a cost. The cost of the lockdown at midnight was clear - the inexorable descent into despair of the country's vulnerable migrant workers. Because work had ground to a halt, they were expendable till the lockdown lasted. If they were not needed, they did not exist.

They should have taken it on the chin. Even when all avenues of survival were closed to them, poverty and privation were curses they were used to. It was their lot to be invisible. That was the expectation - both during the early days when they were bereft of work, shelter, money and food, and later, when industries opening up, wanted the labour captive.

Who are Middle Class people ?

The McKinsey Global Institute⁴, which defines India's Middle class as household with real annual disposable income between 200,00 and 1 million rupees. The Indian Middle class constitutes 300-350 million of the population.

How middle class is also suffering ?

The condition of survival can be easily observed through the way of their living standard. During the lockdown period, the circle of money has been stopped but the demand has not stopped. The expenses such as spending on bills and on other essential items remain same. Even inflation can be observed during the period of lockdown. School fee, Electricity bill, Essential items, Grocery, and many more expenses are there which a person has to pay.

² Minister of finance of India, speech on budget

³ story of a women, broadcasted on BBC news

⁴ Data available at www.americasquerty.org



Without any circulation of money and business, it has become very difficult for a person to pay these bills and help his family. Consequently, this situation has increased the death rate, suicide attempts and even depression among those who have a responsibility to foster their family.

Ongoing lockdown, which has crippled the economy for more than a month and sparked unprecedented distress, has turned the so-called lower middle class into the new poor identities of the society.

Teachers in unaided private schools, office assistants, data entry operators, salespersons, receptionists, beauticians, those who run small mobile phone service and repair shops and other service providers who fall in ₹5,000 to ₹15,000 monthly income group, are the badly hit. Most of them have not received the salaries for two months and they hardly have any savings to fall upon. Many of them fear job loss post-lockdown.

It is not just the socially poor and the migrant workers who are facing the brunt of coronavirus⁵ induced lockdown. Activists say lower middle class families with meager income are badly hit but the problem is not getting due attention because of lopsided priorities.

While those categorized below the poverty line are getting some sort of assistance in the form of cooked food, ration or financial aid from the central and state governments or NGOs and philanthropists; an overwhelming majority of the lower middle class are left high and dry. The middle class is caught in a dilemma as their dignity holds them back from extending their hands to seek aid while the NGOs and philanthropists will be reluctant to give any assistance lest they feel bad about it. Mazher Hussain⁶, Executive Director of Confederation of Voluntary Associations (COVA) told IANS.

"These people don't seek help from anybody. They don't stand in queues for aid. They have been working hard and carrying on with their life but the crisis has suddenly made them vulnerable. Many have not received salary for March and may not get for a couple of months more,"⁷ he said.

Rules made by Government for Migrants and Middle Class: Virtual or Real

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday lauded the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) decision to cut benchmark interest rates, three-moratorium on payment of installments, along with other measures on term loans will help the middle-class and the

businesses deal with the 21-day nationwide lockdown in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.

"Today RBI has taken giant steps to safeguard our economy from the impact of the Coronavirus. The announcements will improve liquidity, reduce cost of funds, help middle-class and businesses," Modi said in a tweet.

Among the measures the finance minister announced were 2 months' worth of free food grain supply for migrants who aren't covered under National Food Security Act or who don't hold a ration card. The Centre's move, which will cost Rs 3,500 crore, is expected to benefit around eight crore migrants. The migrants will get 5kg of grain per person and 1kg of chickpeas for a family⁸.

The measures comprise the second tranche of a Rs 20-lakh crore bailout package equivalent to 10 per cent of India's gross domestic product announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a nationwide televised address aired Tuesday.

The government hopes the actions will reboot India's economy which has been devastated by the Covid-19 pandemic. "This shall not be just a financial package but a reform stimulus, a mindset overhaul and a thrust in governance," the government said.

Sitharaman on Wednesday unveiled the first part of the package called "Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-reliant India)" which targeted small business, non-bank "shadow" lenders and the electricity distribution sector. She offered an array of credit lines for small business and shadow banks as well as money for electricity distributors.

To facilitate the use of ration cards by migrants, technology is being installed to allow them to access the public distribution system for purchasing their rations at any fair price shop in the country, Sitharaman said Thursday.

The government has taken the step of implementing of the scheme that it calls "One Nation One Ration Card" because many migrants moving back to their home states have been unable to access food supplies there. The One Nation One Ration Card scheme has been in the works for some time but its introduction has been accelerated by the Covid-19 crisis.

The action should benefit some 67 crore people in 23 states representing 83 per cent of the people who use the public distribution system, or PDS, by August of this year. By March 2021, the government hopes to have introduced 100 per cent national portability for the PDS scheme.

In a bid to silence critics who have said that the government response to the Covid-19 crisis so far has been inadequate, Sitharaman said that the

⁵ livmint.com

⁶ CEO, Confederation of Voluntary Association (COVA)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Package announced by Minister of Finance of India to combat the pandemic



“government has not been sitting idle” during the nationwide lockdown, now in its eighth week, aimed at containing the spread of the virus.

RENTAL HOUSING SCHEME

The government also plans to create an affordable rental housing accommodation scheme for migrant labourers and urban poor. It will convert government-funded housing in cities to rental complexes through a public-private partnership.

The government will offer incentives to manufacturing units, industries and institutions to develop affordable complexes on their private property. The Centre will also provide incentives to state government agencies to take similar action.

“The relief announced by Honourable Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman Ji will provide immediate relief to millions of farmers, street vendors and people from different walks of life,” said Union minister Nitin Gadkari.

But the Opposition Congress party slammed the finance minister’s bailout as a “jumla package.” Congress leader Anand Sharma said the economic package “is way short of what the Prime Minister had promised the nation and is deeply disappointing.”

LOANS FOR STREET VENDORS

The government will provide special loans of up to Rs 10,000 that street vendors can use as working capital to re-launch their businesses. The government hopes that some 50 lakh street vendors will benefit from the scheme that aims to provide an overall cash flow of up to Rs 5,000 crore.

There will also be a 2 per cent interest subsidy for 12 months on all MUDRA-Shishu loans below Rs 50,000. Mudra-Shishu loans are the smallest ones provided under the Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency or MUDRA.

Sitharaman said the government’s rescue plan is intended “to spur growth and to build a very self-reliant India.” She said the focus of the programme is on “factors of production which are land, labour, liquidity and law.”

Critics worry though that the government is focusing too much on injecting liquidity into the economy rather than offering measures that will stimulate demand.

HOME LOAN SUBSIDY PROGRAMME

A credit-linked subsidy programme subsidising interest rates on affordable home loans for middle-income families will be extended until March 2021 from March 2020. The subsidy scheme is aimed at those earning between Rs 6 lakh to Rs 18 lakh annually.

Some 3.3 lakh middle-income families have already taken advantage of the scheme and the

extension is seen helping another 2.5 lakh families. The result will be an investment of over Rs 70,000 crore in housing.

REALITY

Well, if one looks at all these plans, it seems like that the Government is doing its best to secure its citizens. However, all these things look like a trap to seal the mouth of people. Migrants have to wait on a long queue to get the food. In addition to it, the worst part of it is the food which is being served is of low-quality and sometimes it is half cooked. On the other hand, the facilities which is being assumed that would be beneficial for the middle class, is worth less. As EMIs are being deducted from the bank. Fees are demanded by the school. And other bills are also being paid by them. Loss in the business is also being witnessed at a large scale. Many industries have been closed. Tourism and Hotel industries are almost disappear. As huge loss is faced by them. The questions which arise here in my mind are that , "Is really there is a need to make such policy?"

"Do these policies have any vital role in improving the condition of migrants and middle class?"

Certainly, in country like India, where politics is much dominant than the safety and welfare of the people; really need people to come together and free their country from such manipulative and virtual speakers.

To conclude, I would like to pen down by saying that undoubtedly, the condition and pandemic is very hazardous. People need to combat this situation by coming together . Rich and others who can help others must provide support to the weak. Along with that, Government should also try to make such policies through which assistance is given to those who are actual in need and should also try to have a keen eye on the people who are doing corruption and in spite of giving help , they are just filling their pockets.

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